

Benjamin P. Westervelt House
County Road
Cresskill, Bergen County, New Jersey

HABS-NJ-422

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

Benjamin P. Westervelt House
County Road
Cresskill, Bergen County, New Jersey

Owner: Peter B. Westervelt, Grant Avenue, Cresskill

Date of Erection: Wing probably pre-Revolutionary;
main house 1808

Architect:

Builder: Wing probably Petrus Westervelt; main part
Benjamin Westervelt

Present Condition: Excellent

Number of Stories: Two

Materials of Construction: Foundation - fieldstone and
sandstone

Exterior walls - wing mixed
stone; main house
red sandstone;
gables frame con-
struction

Interior walls - plaster

Inside brick chimneys

Roof - gambrel on main part;
pitch on wing

Historical Data:

This house stands on a piece of land patented to
Isaac Bedlow in 1669; it was sold to Jacobus Van Cortlandt
in 1728. The tract is supposed to have been bought by

Johannes³ Westervelt who was the grandson of Lubbert Lubbertse¹, the first of the family in America, who came from Holland in 1662. Johannes was baptised in 1696 and married in 1718; we know he lived at Cresskill, but there is no evidence that he built a house on this tract. We do know that his eldest son Petrus⁴, who was baptised in 1722 and married about 1745, lived here at Cresskill and was the probable builder of the wing. We assume this because there is a house standing on this spot marked on Erskine's map as Westerfell's. The main house bears the date 1808 carved on the lintel over the main entrance door. We know this was erected by Benjamin P.⁵ Westervelt, the son of Petrus, who was born in 1763 and died in 1845. Benjamin served in the Revolution; he was imprisoned twice by the British and thrown in the Sugar House; when he was captured a third time by his Tory neighbors, he was recaptured by Colonel Blanch of the militia. He married in 1784 at the close of the war. The property passed to Benjamin's son Petrus⁶ born in 1796 and died in 1870. The next owner was Petrus's only son John P. B.⁷ Westervelt; his son Peter⁸ is the present owner.

Although a house is marked on Erskine's map as standing here at the time of the Revolution, it is impossible to tell whether it was the old house of Johannes Westervelt or the wing of the present house. The wing does not date back as far as Johannes's day and may not have been built before the Revolution. However, it seems likely that Johannes's son Petrus built the wing shortly before the Revolution and that it is the house marked on Erskine's map. The wing, however, has many unusual features that are characteristic of the late eighteenth century: the cutting and laying of the stone in the side wall which is as finished as in the front, the use of stone lintels in such a small unit, two doors and one window in the south elevation instead of the reverse, and the position of the chimney near the center rather than at the end. It may easily be said that Benjamin was the builder of the wing shortly

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after the Revolution. The main house shows early nineteenth century influence; it is built of well-dressed stone and has a gambrel roof. The doors and windows have stone lintels with raised stone decoration in the center. The overhang may be of a later date; it is supported by square columns.

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Walter E. Kurt
Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams
SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, F.A.I.A.
District Officer

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A D D E N D U M

In our first write-up we stated that the wing was probably pre-revolutionary and was probably built by Petrus Westervelt. In doing this we were following Miss Bailey who states that a house standing on this spot is marked on Erskine's map as Westerfells. She goes on to say that it is impossible to tell whether it was the old house of the Johannes Westervelt or the wing of the present house. We now know from an examination of the construction that the house marked on Erskine's map was no part of the present house. The construction shows that both the cellar wall and the house wall of the east elevation of the main unit are independent, so that the wing was probably built against the main house at a later date. If the wing is older then its west wall must have been removed when the main house was built; this is not likely to have been the case. Miss Bailey also mentions the position of the chimney in the center of the wing, but the wing was originally one room and later a fireplace was put in the center of this room. There was originally a fireplace in the east end of the wing.

Walter C. Rutt
Supervising Historian

RW